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The Structural Design of Job Revisited

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New Insights into the Structural Design of Job

Special attention paid to the position of 42,1-6

Since the book of Job is in actual fact a literary drama, it can in terms of the plot be divided into seven scenes or episodes in a menorah pattern reflecting the seven interrelated stages in the dramatic story:

Scene 1: Chapters 1-2	The severe testing of a devout man	35 verses
Scene 2: Chapters 3-14	Job and his friends discuss divine justice: Round 1	
Scene 3: Chapters 15-26	Job and his friends discuss divine justice: Round 2	
Scene 4: Chapters 27-31	Job's final discourses (at the centre of the menorah)	52 (2x26)
Scene 5: Chapters 32-37	The intervention of an angry young man, Elihu	
Scene 6: Chapters 38-41	The intervention of YHWH out of a whirlwind	
Scene 7: Chapter 42	The denouement of the drama	17 verses

What meets the eye immediately is that the heart of the book - Scenes 2-6 - is surrounded by the opening and closing Scenes 1 and 7 consisting of **52 (2x26)** Masoretic verses. This, and the fact that Scene 7 is made up of **17** verses, are the first signs that Chapter 42 is a distinct literary entity, in which 42,1-6 is an essential component. As a result, I shall propose a structural design that differs precisely on this point from the current view of the book, which is based on the supposition that the presumed so-called 'poetic core' (3,1-42,6) is enclosed by an independent framework consisting of a 'Prologue' (1-2) and an 'Epilogue' (42,7-17). The generally accepted view is therefore based on the differentiation between poetry and prose.

I shall argue that the so-called Epilogue, Scene 7, is constituted by Chapter 42 in its entirety, consisting of an introduction in prose (42,1), Job's confession (42,2-3) and YHWH's call on him to repent (42,4-6) in poetic form, and the completion of the denouement as a narrative in prose (42,7-17). This means that Scene 7, Chapter 42, is a mixture of poetry and prose and that a rigorous differentiation between prose and poetry is inappropriate. This also applies to Scene 1 (Chapters 1-2), which has at least one poetic passage (1,21), and of course also to Scene 7 with one poetic passage (42,2-6).

As for the so-called 'poetic core' (3,1-42,6), the fact of the matter is that it is anything but pure poetry - see the prose sections 3,1-2; 4,1, 6,1; 8,1; 9,1; 11,1; 12,1; 15,1; 16,1; 18,1; 19,1; 20,1; 21,1; 22,1; 23,1; 25,1; 26,1; 27,1; 29,1; 32,1-6aα; 34,1; 35,1; 36,1; 38,1; 40,1 and 42,1. In reality, the dramatic movement in the book as a whole is from beginning to end presented as an *ongoing narrative*, the greater part of which is poetry. In the presumed 'poetic core' it is precisely the prose sections that determine its structure. This means that the book has been conceived from the outset as a structural unity. The idea that 'the story is used to enclose the poetic centre' and that 'both story and poetry stand on their own' - see *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, III, p. 859 - is a misrepresentation of the real state of affairs.

Consequently, in my opinion, the traditional, generally accepted, differentiation between prose and poetry as a criterion to ascertain the structural design of the book has given scholars a wrong impression of its real architecture and should be abandoned as improper. This also goes for the supposed 'framework' and the ill-chosen terms 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue'. My serious doubts about the use of this differentiation as a structural device does of course not imply that I have reservations about the scholarly right to study the poetic sections of the book in their own right. For such a study, see Pieter van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job*, in: OT Studiën XXXII, E.J. Brill: Leiden - New York - Köln, 1995.

The first indication that the structural design presented here is appropriate is the reliability of the chapter arrangement throughout the book (including 38 and 39). The question is: why should the first forty chapters of MT in broad outline be truthful and only 41 (taken as 41,1-42,6) and 42 (taken as 42,7-17) be incorrect? Even the chapter arrangement of Scene 1 (Chapters 1-2), is generally regarded as correct despite the fact that MT has a Petuchah after 3,1, suggesting that 3,1 belongs to the preceding chapter.

In addition to what has been said above, I shall now put forward no less than four numerical considerations which underscore the chapter arrangement of 41 and 42 with 42,1-6 as integral within Chapter 42.

First, Chapter 41 has been rounded off and sealed by its **26** verses as a compositional unity, which entails that 42,1-6 is structurally not integral within 41.

Second, Chapter 42 has been rounded off and sealed as a compositional unity by its **17** verses, which means that 42,1-6 is undeniably integral within Chapter 42.

Third, the passage in 42,1-11 about the denouement (demarcated by a Setumah after v. 11), which is generally regarded as Job's confession (1-6) followed by YHWH's rebuke of Job's three friends and Job's rehabilitation (7-9), his restoration and the celebration of his recovery by his relatives (10-11), has been sealed by **170** words. Moreover, 42,1-6 is also an essential part of the larger passage 42,1-15 (likewise demarcated by a Setumah), which is made up of **221** (13x17) words. Accordingly, 42,1-6 does not belong to Chapter 41, because it is structurally integral within Chapter 42, being an essential part of the denouement.

Fourth, Scenes 1 and 7 are both concerned with the personal aspects of Job's life: Scene 1 at the beginning of the book is about his biographical data, his distinguishing qualities, and God's experiment with him by allowing the Adversary to let him suffer a series of terrible disasters. Scene 7 at the end is about Job's personal estimation of God and his all-wise rule of the universe, Job's righteousness declared by God, God's rebuke of the friends, and Job's rehabilitation and complete restoration.

Being each other's opposites, the opening and concluding scenes belong very closely together: Job's suffering through the terrible disasters necessarily demands his rehabilitation and restoration. Their inseparability is numerically underscored by the fact that Chapters 1-2 and 42 have altogether **35 + 17 = 52** (2x26) verses.

There is a comparable situation in the book of Deuteronomy: the Introduction of **5** verses (1,1-5) and the Epilogue of **12** verses (34,1-12) have altogether **17** verses, which bind the prologue and the Epilogue closely together as a structural unity.

Finally, there is another important piece of evidence which confirms the view that 42,1-6 belongs to Scene 7. In his book *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, 170, D.A. Dorsey has demonstrated the structural unity of the 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue' by his discovery of the beautiful chiasmic matching of the two sections. However, he failed to see that 42,1-6 is an essential part of the 'Epilogue', where it constitutes nothing less than the meaningful centre of the overall symmetry. Moreover, he overlooked the crucial idea of Job's intercession and his integrity. The story of Job that encloses the disputations and discourses, can now be outlined in the following way, resulting in **17** key ideas:

- 1 **introduction**: Job lives a righteous life (1,1)
- 2 **Job's children**: seven sons and three daughters (1,2)
- 3 **Job's flocks**: 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys (1,3)
- 4 **Job's family members** come together for a feast (1,4)
- 5 **Job intercedes** for his children by means of an offering (1,5)
- 6 **Job's integrity** will persist during the afflictions according to YHWH (1,6-2,10; especially 2,3)
- 7 **the three friends** (names listed) go to Job to console him (2,11)
- 8 **the three friends** have no words; seven days and seven nights (2,12-13)
- 9 **Job's confession and YHWH's call on him to repent** (42,1-6)
- 8 **the three friends** rebuked for their words; seven bulls and seven rams (42,7-8a)
- 7 **the three friends** (names listed) must go to Job for help (42,8b)
- 6 **Job's integrity** is endorsed by YHWH: he has spoken of God what is right (42,8b)
- 5 **Job has interceded** for his friends by praying for them (42,9b)
- 4 **Job's family members** come together for a feast (42,11)
- 3 **Job's flocks**: 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, 1,000 donkeys (42,12)
- 2 **Job's children**: seven sons and three daughters (42,13-15)
- 1 **conclusion**: Job dies old and full of days (42,16-17).

Pieter van der Lugt has recently put forward a revolutionary interpretation of 42,2-6, in his article "Who Changes his Mind about Dust and Ashes? The Rhetorical Structure of Job 42:2-6", in: *VT* 64/4 (2014), 623-639. Contrary to the generally accepted view that 42,2-6 is about Job's humble admission of ignorance and his repentance 'in dust and ashes', he argues that 42,4-6 is to be ascribed to YHWH, in which v. 5 is phrased as 'a line spoken by Job', or better, in my opinion, as a *confession to be declared* by Job. This means that YHWH calls on Job to reassess in retrospect his estimation of God, on the basis of which YHWH expresses his apology to him and his compassion with him in his suffering (v. 6). What follows is my translation of the passage:

4 Hear, and I (YHWH) will speak; I will question you and you must *declare to me*:

5 "I (Job) had heard of you from hearsay, but now my eye has seen you".

6 Therefore, I (YHWH) recant and have compassion *with* dust and ashes (Job as a frail human being).

However, there is another, in my view, more plausible interpretation by taking 42,4-6 *in its entirety* as YHWH's words and 42,5-6 as the confession YHWH calls on Job to declare. This entails that it is after all not YHWH but Job who recants and repents.

4 Hear, and I (YHWH) will speak; I will question you and you must *declare to me*:

5 "I (Job) had heard of you from hearsay, but now my eye has seen you;

1 Therefore, I recant and repent *in* dust and ashes".

To sum up: giving 42,1-6 its rightful place in Scene 7 as the beginning of the denouement, can help us to understand its double function as the bridge between God's speech out of the whirlwind (Chapters 38-41), and Job's response (42,1-3) followed by YHWH's call on him to repent (42,4-6). Job's confession (42,2-3) and his repentance (42,5-6) constitute the essential prerequisites for his theological rehabilitation and his personal and material restoration (42,7-17).

Consequently, in Table III below about Job's words I shall regard 42,5-6 as words he has to affirm.

Finally, by regarding 42,4-6 as spoken by YHWH, the introduction to the last divine speech (42,7-8) becomes truly meaningful: "After YHWH had spoken *these words* to Job, YHWH said to Eliphaz the Te'manite:", because '*these words*' refer specifically to 42,5-6.